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JAMAICA: ELECTION OUTLOOK

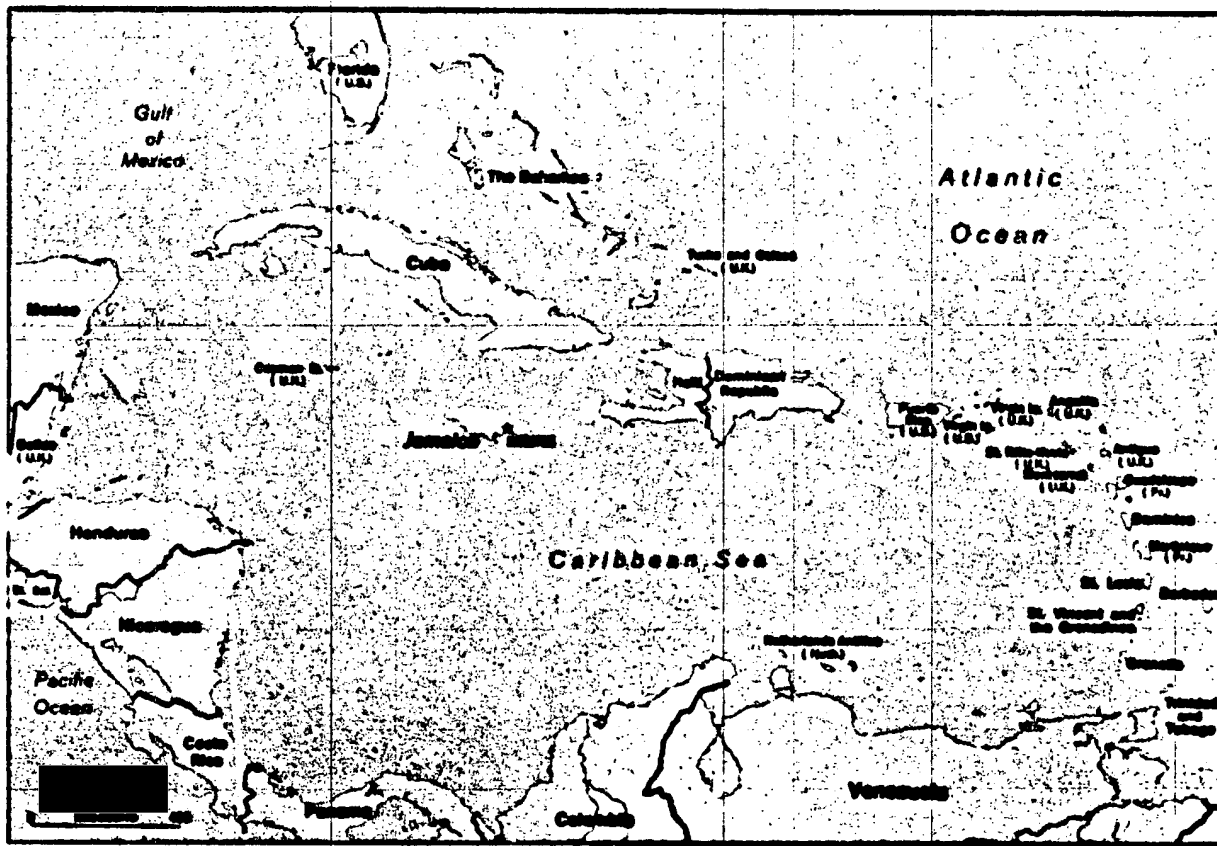
Prime Minister Manley's surprisingly effective campaign is dampening predictions of an overwhelming victory for the opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) in the coming election. Although Manley is closing the gap, the Labor Party is maintaining a commanding lead that will be difficult for the Prime Minister to overtake. In the month before the election--probably to be held early next month--radicals in the ruling People's National Party (PNP) will launch their final drive, possibly by provoking a last round of political violence to be blamed on the JLP.

Setting the Date

The moderate-controlled electoral advisory committee, which is laying the groundwork for a reasonably open election, was expected to finish its work by the end of September. The committee, which managed an efficient registration of voters despite high levels of urban violence, last week was validating voter lists and setting up the last of about 6,000 polling stations across the island. After the committee makes its final report to Manley, he will announce the date of the vote, probably at the PNP's annual conference on 5 October. According to tradition, the election would then take place about 4 November--the date favored by local rumor.

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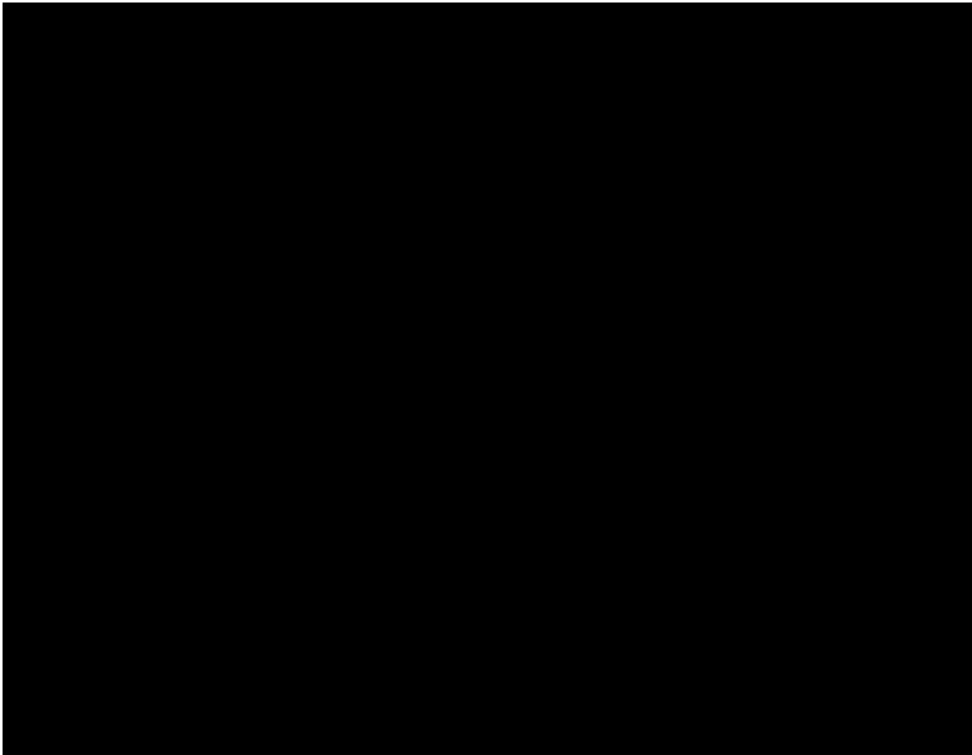
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Manley's Campaign

The Prime Minister's energetic campaign is convincing many local observers that he can win. He is using the International Monetary Fund as a scapegoat for government mismanagement and is waging an anti-CIA propaganda blitz to blame the United States for the plight of the government.



The PNP's campaign has rallied Manley's formerly demoralized followers for a more aggressive effort to win over uncommitted voters. According to a reliable poll taken this month, the PNP has gained four percentage points since June--trimming the JLP's lead in the popular vote to a still sizable 7.6 percent. Manley's support will increase if the JLP's campaign peaks early or runs



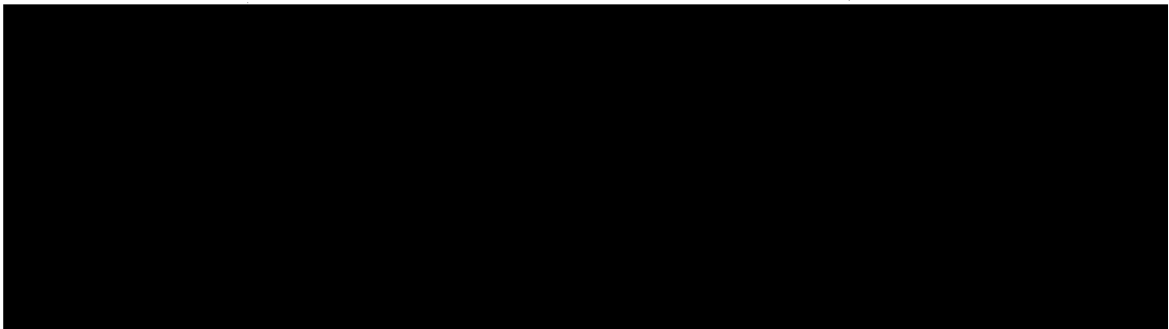
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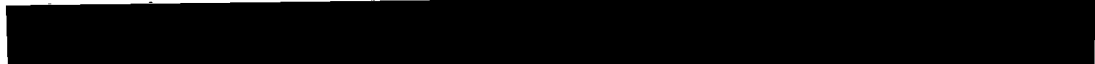
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short of funds--a specter its leader, Edward Seaga, raises dramatically, possibly to elicit contributions. Moreover, 18 percent of the sample in the poll was either undecided or disinclined to vote, which gives the PNP a reasonable prospect to close the gap even further. Historically, however, the holdouts have divided their votes evenly between the parties.

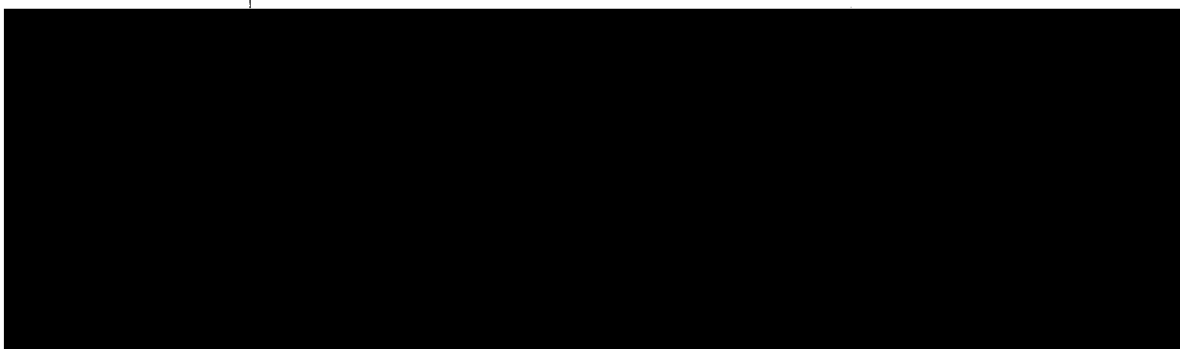


Prospects

Tensions and street violence probably will increase significantly in the formal campaign period--tentatively set to run from the first week of October to the first week of November. To boost their position further, PNP radicals conceivably could call up 120 thugs 



and some politicized members of the more than 8,000-member National Home Guard. While these groups probably could not win a showdown with the security forces and JLP gunmen, they could be used selectively to provide Manley with some incremental gains he apparently believes could add up to a victory in a photo finish.




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Although the JLP undoubtedly has lost ground in recent months, it still has the advantage. The party retains support in the countryside--its traditional stronghold--which holds more parliamentary seats overall than the urban centers where Manley's fortunes are improving. The recent poll, for example, translated the JLP's popular vote into a majority of 38 to 40 seats in the 60-member House of Representatives. Despite Manley's momentum, he probably will have increasing difficulty in the final weeks as he confronts the bedrock of opposition support steadily built up over two years of acute economic hardship among organized labor, small farmers, the professional and business classes, and the security forces.



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